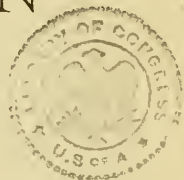


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A SERMON

SUGGESTED BY THE



Assassination of President Garfield,

AND PREACHED BY THE

REV. SIDNEY CORBETT, D. D.,

At St. Thomas Church,

BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN,

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1881.

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MEMORIAL SERMON.

“Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.” 2 Peter 2 : 10.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God ; the powers that be are ordained of God.” Romans 13 : 1.

“Honor the king.” 1 Peter 2 : 17.

WHEN jewelers wish to adorn a ring, they sometimes compass their aim by appropriating for it only a diamond solitaire ; but at other times they are more prodigal, and then they cluster together several choice gems of the finest water, and thus bejewel the hand of the owner with diversified resplendence. Now, the God of nature and the God of the Bible are one and the same, and as he imbedded mineral gems in the bosom of the earth, so, likewise, has he incorporated verbal gems on the pages of sacred Scripture ; and as the lapidary exercises his own judgment as to the number of precious stones he shall employ to garnish the jewel he is making, so it is the lawful prerogative of the preacher to determine for himself how many inspired epigrams or Bible gems he shall appropriate in order to gird his sermon with Scriptural endorsement.

On this occasion, I have ventured to appropriate three Bible jewels as texts for our discourse. I do not intend to give a theological exegesis of all, or of any of them. I employ the three because in their combination they corruscate and forecast the very line of thought we are venturing into.

The world's great dramatist teaches that "after Julius Cæsar was wickedly and cowardly stabbed in the senate house, his body was taken to the Roman forum, where Mark Antony pronounced his eulogy, commencing with these words, 'Friends, Romans, and countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury, not to praise him.'" And with a slight change of phraseology I at this time may appropriate thus much of the exordium of the speech of Mark Antony and say to you, here and now, "I come to bury President Garfield, and not to praise him." Our deceased President requires no special panegyric from me, for his praise is in all of your hearts and constantly wells up therefrom. If this is not the case, what meaneth the Bible aphorism, "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"?

We said, "We have hither come to bury our deceased President." Nor do we wish to qualify that assertion. It is true, the President will have his family—his bodily burial on the morrow; but as his jurisdiction extended over all of the United States, so all of the people of these United States who cannot then and there be present, claim the right to mournfully shed the tear of sympathy, and each one to say for himself and for herself, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust;" and when thus much is said and done, and after we have commended his soul to his Saviour and his afflicted family to Him who has promised to be a husband to the widow, and a father to the fatherless, then we too have to some degree participated in the burial of our nation's beloved chieftain.

Order, which is only another name or word for government, is Heaven's high law, and it is because the celestial government is not infringed upon, that uninterrupted harmony become "the music of the spheres."

It is because government or order is Heaven's high law,



that at altitudes which no unaided eye can reach, the central forces are producing circular motion, by spurring the heavenly bodies on with a centrifugal propulsion, whilst at the same time, they are tethered in their God-given orbits by a centripetal force, thus causing them to rotate. It is because government or order is Heaven's high law, that no frictionizing occurs amongst heaven's starry host, and that each several star radiates its own quantum of splendor.

But as it is in celestial regions, so, too, is it in this nethermost world. Order, or government, is the watchword of the entire physical economy. The tides know their time to ebb and flow, and the oceanic waters have their own metes and bounds beyond which they do not trespass.

The year is broken into fragments that we call seasons, and dumb nature clothes itself with verdure, and flowers, and fruit, and never makes a mistake as to its own time of visitation. The orchards do not blossom and fruit in winter, and the water never congeals into ice during midsummer. God prearranged a programme for all the works of his hand, and each several creation performs its own individual part in the order the great Creator ordained.

Now, as order, or government, is God's law throughout all of physical nature, so order or government is God's law throughout the moral realm. Where government is not, there is chaos. A vessel at sea without government would become shipwrecked. An army, ungoverned, would become a body of uniformed tramps. A school, ungoverned, would become a rendezvous of ignorance and self-will. A business ungoverned, would end in bankruptcy. A home, ungoverned, would culminate in domestic infelicity and disgrace.

Whoever has travelled in the Orient, knows that even the roving desert Arabs, or Bedouins, are under the strong-

est sort of a government. The Czar of all the Russians was never more autocratic and imperial in authority than the Sheik of a tribe of Bedouins. From his dictum there is no appeal. And thus you may journey where you will, up and down, throughout the moral realm, and you everywhere will find a throne and a scepter for government, or order.

In the days of man's innocency in Eden, there was a government that told the primal pair what they could eat, and what they should not eat. If this was not the case, there could have been no penalty awarded to disobedience. If in this lax age, it is possible occasionally to find a turbulent and restless people, who for the nonce have shaken off order, or government, and have become a law unto themselves, you are at once brought face to face with "Communism," which is the progeny of him who made war against the order, or government, of Heaven. And thus we discover that throughout God's universe there must be either government or "Communism." If we have government, we are protected in our person, and in our property. We are as safe whilst we sleep as when we are awake. If business or pleasure calls us away from the theatre of our enterprises, the property we leave behind is secure, because the Argus eye of a benign government keeps watch and ward over all of our interests. In a word, "justice and equity" are the mightiest factors in every good government. But with "Communism" all is different. In "Communism" there is no security for either person or property. "Communism" and "license" are one and the same. "Communism," means license to burn, license to steal, license to kill, license to confiscate, license to ravish, license to break down the defenses of civilization. It means bloody handed vandalism, treading law and order underneath its feet.

If you would know what "Communism" is, tear out and read a page of French History. And as you read, your heart will sicken, and your blood will curdle, and you will turn away from the record in disgust.

I was at Paris during the days of the last empire. At that time it was the most beautiful city in the world. It was the grand rallying spot of the wealth and refinement of all nations. Its magnificent boulevards were moving panoramas. Its public buildings and galleries were the wonder and envy of all visitors. Its schools for science and art were supremely beneficent. A few years elapsed, and again I visited that world's Capitol. During the period of my absence, "Communism" for a time had throttled government, and anarchy had enthroned itself. And, oh, what a scene of desolation was before me! "*Fraternite*," and "*Egalite*," that formerly were inscribed upon the city walls were effaced, and "*Ichabod*," which means, "where now is thy glory?" seemed the only remaining legend. The public archives, with their valuable documents, were destroyed.

The *grandiose Hotel de Ville*, or City Hall, with all its wealth of architectural beauty and history and commodiousness, was only a smoking ruin. The *Arc de triomph*, that the first Napoleon erected to sing the praises of French prowess, was battered and defaced. The costly and elegant church of the Madelaine was bruised. The palace of the Tuileries was laid low. The Column of Vendome had come down, and measured its length upon the pavements. The public buildings were smoking and charred wrecks, and men who, in the days of the government, were capitalists, became, by reason of the "Communitic reign," impoverished and disheartened. The bestialized sensualities of that "Communitic mob" we shall not dwell upon. They are too revolting and too sickening to uncurtain.

We have only sought to show that government is a nation's safeguard. It is man's necessity. Where there is no government, there will be found the fury of unbridled passions.

The worst government is better than anarchy. In proof of this, let us consult St. Paul, who was versed in law as well as in Christianity. St. Paul wrote a letter to the Christians at Rome, and in it he gave them some advice showing them it was their duty to be loyal to those in civil authority where they dwelt. Some of the Jews entertained scruples as to the propriety of obeying *heathen* magistrates. St. Paul wrote a letter to show them they need have no compunctions on that account. He did not tell them that theocracy, or monarchy, or democracy was best. He wrote to tell them they providentially were living in an empire, and under the government of an emperor, and that every one of them owed allegiance to that emperor and to his laws. He said to them, "Let every soul of you be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinances of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Thus we find the erudite St. Paul enjoining the Christians at Rome to be obedient to the civil authority that surrounded them. Let us turn back the pages of history, and see who the ruler of Rome was at the time St. Paul wrote that letter. It was no other than the infamous Nero, one of the most cruel and wicked men who has trod our earth. There is no conceivable sin of which that emperor was not guilty. He was a robber, a despot, a glutton, a poisoner, a drunkard, a liar, a coward. He revelled in the sufferings of others. He murdered his distinguished teacher. He murdered his mother. He murdered St. Paul, and subsequently he com-

mitted suicide. And such a vile man as that is the very emperor that the Apostle told the Roman Christians to obey. Why?—Because in the providence of God Nero was at the head of the civil authority, and “the powers that be are ordained of God.” None of us can read the inscrutable ways of Providence, and hence we cannot comprehend why some persons are born under the authority of a civil magistrate who is as base as England’s Jeffreys, or as Rome’s Nero, any more than we can understand why God suffers some of us to be born under the authority of a wicked or drunken father, and then writes as upon the palms of our hands, “Children, obey your parents.” In both instances, we can only stay and encourage our hearts with the apostolic assurance that “the powers that be are ordained of God;” and what we cannot fathom now, we shall clearly comprehend hereafter.

By what we already have observed, we see two plain facts standing out in bold relief. The first is, “The end and aim of all good government is to promote human happiness.” The second plain fact is, “the superficiality of the atheistical theory, that magistrates in civil government are elected simply by the people.” Why, even Louis Napoleon (fatalist though he was) always signed his state documents as Emperor of France, “by the will of the French people, and by the grace of God;” and it is an absolute necessity that God be recognized in all earthly governments—for how otherwise can he be the Supreme Ruler of the universe,—the Lord of lords, the King of kings? St. Paul gives us the cue when he says, “Whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him and for him.” If we exclude God from human governments, thereby virtually saying, “We have no need for him,” how absurd is the observance of “fast days,” and

“thanksgiving days,” how self-deceptive our praying to him during national trials, during seasons of famine, and plague, and locusts, and drought.

A government with God left out is a misnomer. Such an idea savors of barbarism. It must be said of all lawful governments, as is said of individuals, “In God we live and move and have our being;” and if God should forget the governments of earth as they so frequently forget him, such sovereignties would disintegrate and crumble.

Now, one of the lessons of our sermon is this: “Every one of us should be subject to the legitimate governing powers that surround us, even in word and thought.” We must not kick against the authority that is placed over us.

Most of us are refractory in our habit of thought, and in the language of another we say, “We will not have this man to rule over us.” We “speak evil of dignities.” Now, loyal obedience is something that can be acquired only by practice. It is quite an art for a man to become as well disciplined in *civil* affairs, as an army soldier is disciplined in military life. Such an attainment is a part of one’s education, and the earlier in life it is undertaken, the sooner it will be acquired.

If you should go to a man fifty years old who had never learned his letters, and with an open book ask him to read it, he would tell you he had not learned his alphabet, and therefore could not read the book; and so, if you should go to a man fifty years old, who, during all his life, had been a violator of law, and should ask him to become loyal to home, and church, and state government, he would tell you it was impossible, and because he did not know the alphabet of obedience, because all his life long, he “had been a law unto himself;” and this logically brings us to just the thought we wish to infix in the minds of

every one present; viz., "If you want loyal citizens," "if you want loyal and reliable clerks," "if you want obedient scholars," "if you want Christ-like Christians," you must fashion your children by wholesome discipline in the morning of life, in your own homes, and beside your own hearthstones.

Children who set home government at defiance, will set the laws of the land at defiance, and this incontrovertible fact lays a terrible responsibility upon the fathers and mothers of our land. If parents suffer their home laws to be trodden under foot, they have none but themselves to blame, if their children become emboldened, and in after years attempt to tread state laws under foot, and thereby disgrace themselves and all who are bound to them by kinship or friendship. Solomon was second to none in wisdom, and he emphatically recommended home discipline. To demand obedience from our children "is not," as some suppose, "to crucify our affection for them." On the contrary, "to insist upon filial obedience tends to augment, the children's chances for success in after life."

St. Paul explains what we mean, in one verse, when he says: "For rulers, whether parents or teachers, are not a tenor to *good* works, but to *evil*. Wilt thou then not be *afraid* of the power? Do that which is *good*, and then thou shalt have praise of the same." And thus we come back to our former statement that, "the foundation of all good government is to be laid by the parents, around and about their own firesides."

The subject we are discussing was terribly illustrated on the 2d of July last, by the assassination of our President. Charles Guiteau, whose entire life has been that of disobedience and self-will, cowardly and diabolically shot down without cause or provocation the chief magistrate of

our nation. This assassin was once an innocent child, and as plastic in the hands of his parents as clay is plastic in the hands of the potter; but, through lack of domestic discipline, he soon was emboldened to cast off home restraint, and walked in his own ways, and indulged in his own devices; until at last, with an insatiable itch for notoriety, he caught the spirit of the Russian Nihilists, and fired the bullets that ultimately closed the life of our beloved President. And this review of the culprit suggests the terrible thought that possibly some of us through our lack of parental discipline, are raising up about our own hearthstones assassins just as diabolical as this same Guiteau, whom the civilized world execrates.

But is there not one single extenuating cause for the nefarious and murderous act of this assassin? There is a proverb that "even the devil is entitled to his due," and so too I think this blood-thirsty murderer should have the benefit of every extenuating incentive to evil, no matter how feeble it is.

Now I assert, and without fear of challenge, that we live in an age and country given over to the assassination of reputation, and the natural outcome of assassination of reputation, is corporeal assassination. We not only "speak evil of dignities," but we speak evil of our peers. We unkindly question each others' motives for action, or non-action, and so long and so freely have we indulged in such injustice that we are more prone to think evil than good of our fellows.

Now, far be it from me to accuse anyone of being the direct instigator of the martyrdom of our President, but the conviction will not down at my bidding, that if there had been no disparagement of our deceased President's acts or motives, it would never have entered the mind and heart

of his assassin to shoot him. The poor, weak-minded man heard our chief magistrate calumniated until he thought he could win national fame by enrolling him with "the noble army of martyrs." The English dictionary has no word sufficiently stout to express the atrociousness of this assassins act. My whole nature revolts when I call to remembrance that murder and that murderer, and yet, inasmuch as "two wrongs never make a right," I hope no unlawful means will be used in his retirement from earth.

We have been advocating "good government," and it is not good government to interfere with the majesty of justice. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord," and we can safely afford to leave this murderer in the hands of an avenging God.

We have given you a pronounced case of what eventuated from a home circle where domestic discipline was ignored, which was nothing less than "regicide," or murder of a nation's president.

Now let us turn to a pleasanter picture, to the home circle of the parents of James A. Garfield. It was a humble abode. "Frugality" was the watchword in that household; but thank God there was honesty and thrift, and an outreach for things that were noble, and pure, and intellectual. "Love" was the presiding genius in that family, and God's government and domestic government were never called in question by any of its members. In that rural home the father and mother were honored, and God was acknowledged and worshiped. The filial obedience that was required of James A. Garfield in his boyhood home, became the habit of his nature and entered into all the checkered scenes of his after life. He never became self-willed. He never cast off parental restraint. To his dying day he was an affectionate son; and to gladden the

heart of his sainted mother, who placed his feet in the paths of wisdom and righteousness, was the climax of his ambition.

It was a great privilege to have been at our nation's seat of government on the fourth of last March, and to see there assembled the ambassadors of all nations in their gorgeous diplomatic attire; to witness that unusual military display with its pomp and pageantry; to listen to the choicest of martial music; and to see one chief magistrate retire, and another take the oath of office and his predecessor's place, and without any governmental frictionizing. But the sublimest sight at Washington on that inauguration day, was the betokened filial affection of James A. Garfield, who as soon as he was inducted into office, turned him about, and entwining his arms around and about his dear old mother, imprinted upon her brow his kiss of loving gratitude. Happy the mother who has such a son, and thrice happy the son who has been thus mothered.

What an auspicious day the fourth of last March was to President Garfield. He who was cradled in penury, by energy and honesty of purpose had surmounted every impediment, and attained the highest gift the American nation could bestow. In his earliest official position he purchased for himself a good degree, and afterward was promoted to the highest offices of trust, until he stood upon the loftiest pedestal the republic could furnish. Like Longfellow's alpine tourist, he seemed to have inscribed upon his banner "Excelsior!" and like that poet's hero, he too went climbing upward "from conquering to conquer."

Since Mr. Garfield was inaugurated, six moons have waxed and waned, and whereas at that time all was big with promise, and "hope told its most flattering tale," now, that President lies in state awaiting to-morrow's burial, and

a nation irrespective of party or section, is plunged into sorest grief.

“How unsearchable are God’s judgments, and his ways past finding out.” By perseverance that was indefatigable, President Garfield became second to none in our country in scholarship. He possessed a versatility of talent. He was a natural orator, which natural gift was perfected by study and experience. He was remarkably proficient in the dead languages, and was so thoroughly up in modern languages as to be able to think in the foreign tongue in which he was speaking. He was not a politician, he was a statesman, and better than all the rest, he acknowledged God in all his ways, and “dared to do right,” whether his constituents would hear or forbear. In a word, he was a manly man.

Not every public officer can be held up as an example for the youth of our land to emulate; but James A. Garfield is an exceptional case, and I would fain point to him as an example to all whom I can influence. His loving obedience to those in authority in his childhood home; his willingness to do whatsoever his hands found to do during his youth to help support the family; his fidelity in every office of trust; his outreach for knowledge; his unsullied moral life; his simple domestic life; his religious life so free from cant; his suavity of manner, and self-contained bearing in all of the exalted positions he filled; his unalloyed affection for his mother; his calmness, and religious acceptance of the situation when perforated with the assassin’s bullets; his almost Christ-like patience during the long weeks of his suffering in the enervating atmosphere at Washington; and the serenity with which he looked at approaching death,—all these are exponents of no ordinary person.

The martyrdom of our President is ended. Last Monday

night he closed his eyes on life's stage—the curtain fell—his soul was taken to the Paradise of God, and the mourners go about the streets in the livery of sorrow. For a brief period, his aged mother survives him; but according to the laws of nature, ere long her soul will wing itself to the Spirit world. And when that day shall come, who doubts that her devoted son will be among the first to welcome her where partings are unknown.

In the ordinary business affairs of life, merchants keep a Ledger, and when they draw off a balance sheet, they consult both the debit and credit side of that Ledger. So, methinks, it should be in social and political life, we must look at both sides.

In the death of our President we have been so occupied in calculating the losses we have sustained, as gladly to close our eyes to all else. Now, this is wrong.

It is an old truism that “every dark cloud has a silver lining.” Let us for a moment search for a “silver lining” in the dark cloud that to-day broods over our nation.

The first thing of such a character that I detect is that, “Our nation now recognizes God as its chief Governor.” This was made manifest when the people got upon their knees, and prayed the Omnipotent Father to “spare our President.” Persons not supposed to be praying men and women, boldly joined in the supplications for his recovery.

Another part of the “silver lining” is, that although God is prayer-hearing and prayer-answering, yet he denied our cumulative request, and thereby shows the world that the American Republic is not dependent upon the wisdom and guidance of any one man be he never so worthy. God wishes us to understand that he holds up the pillars of our government, as he does the pillars of all good governments.

We likewise detect a “silver lining” in our great sorrow,

when we call to mind that President Arthur is better equipped and better qualified to administer the national affairs now, than he would have been had President Garfield died immediately after he was assassinated. He has had an opportunity to discover that the "pulse beat" of our nation is in unison, and that ours is not a government for the preferment of politicians, but "a government of the people, for the people, and by the people." But, coupled with this, we must admit that notwithstanding the embarrassing situation in which President Arthur unexpectedly found himself, he nevertheless has borne himself so discreetly, so chivalrously, so wisely, so tenderly, so honorably that thereby he has commended his course to the approbation of the wise and good of the land; whilst in accepting "the cabinet" appointed by General Garfield for *his* cabinet, he has avoided commercial disturbances, and thus has bespoken the loving loyalty of the American people.

When the Apostle said, "Honor the king," he meant, "Honor whoever is in authority over you." This is a historic fact; for when the Apostle wrote those words, he addressed Christians who did not live under a king, but under an emperor.

General Arthur is now the constitutional president of the United States. We believe he enters upon his administrative duties with a keen sense of his great responsibility. We believe he intends to administer the government impartially, and for the good of all the people. His record is good. His attainments are good, and he is entitled to our homage. Let us all honor and sustain him with a loving confidence, and "*palsied be the tongue*" that first assassinates his reputation without cause; for, unless we wish to transform our glorious Republic into a "*communistic anarchy*," we must not "speak evil of dignities;"

for human nature has not changed since the day when Aristotle declared, "From an evil thought, an evil deed is only one step."

And lastly, one of the grandest outcomes of this dreadful assassination, is the fact that "the chief man of the nation most tentatively but openly proclaimed to all the world his loyalty to Christ."

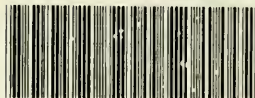
He secured the most scientific physicians our country affords to further his recovery, but at the same time he virtually said to God in the ears of all the people,—

"All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring,
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

Beloved:—"Socrates died like a philosopher," but James A. Garfield died like a *Christian*.

In view of the foregoing, dares any one say, "Our deceased President lived his life in vain"?

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